

VZCZCXRO2703
RR RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLZ
DE RUEHHE #0254/01 0861244
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 271244Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1678
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HELSINKI 000254

SIPDIS

USEU FOR DKANAREK

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [ECON](#) [AMGT](#) [AEMR](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [WHO](#) [FI](#)

SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA EXPECTED TO REACH FINLAND WITHIN A
COUPLE OF WEEKS

AI ON ITS WAY

[11](#). The Finnish government (GOF) is convinced that avian influenza (AI) will spread to Finland by migratory birds returning north. GOF says it is not a matter of "if" AI will arrive in Finland, but rather "when." It is assumed that the virus will be found in Finland as increasing numbers of migratory birds return from wintering grounds further south. Mallard ducks are spending the winter in northern Germany and will return to Finland when the weather gets warmer, according to Matti Aho, Director General, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MOA). When temperatures rise above freezing point, the ducks will arrive, and will probably bring AI with them. GOF officials do not expect poultry to become infected due to the efficiency of disease prevention in poultry farms in Finland.

PRIME MINISTER VANHANEN ON THE AI SITUATION

[12](#). At a press conference on Thursday, March 9th, Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen said that Finns have good reason to feel calm and should exercise common sense. He added that easy-to-understand recommendations and advice are being prepared on what to do if/when dead birds are found.

[13](#). GOF and media have stepped up the pace of informational announcements and articles for the public as confirmed AI cases are revealed in neighboring Sweden, as well as in eleven member states of the EU. Articles with practical, helpful advice on AI causes, transmission and prevention have been carried almost daily in major newspapers.

PESTICIDES KILLED BIRDS IN KOTKA

[14](#). Despite reports of 22 dead birds earlier in February that raised local levels of attention, the GOF reported on February 28 that tests on all bird corpses were negative and confirmed the absence of the AI virus in any of the dead birds found to date. The National Veterinary and Food Research Institute (EELA) confirmed in mid March that the birds died of parathion pesticide poisoning. (Note: As this pesticide is banned, officials are perplexed at and looking for its source.)

BUFFER ZONES

[15](#). The residents of Finland are advised to report dead birds to the provincial veterinarian in cases of more than five swans or ten other birds, under circumstances where cause of death is not evident. The public is continually

reminded not to touch dead birds.

¶16. On the national level, protective buffer zones will be set up around poultry farms in the vicinity of any AI discovery, in order to prevent chickens, turkeys, and other domestic fowl from being infected by wild birds. Measures differ between locations: the same level of readiness is not required in Helsinki, for instance, as in communities elsewhere with large poultry farms. If dead birds are found, the provincial veterinarian will be called, and rescue personnel will help if needed in removing the birds. Police will cordon off the immediate area and place warning signs.

¶17. In addition, a protective zone of three kilometers in diameter will be set up around the site, within which veterinarians will examine all poultry on farms. All dead animals will be destroyed. The transport of poultry within the zone will be restricted, and hygiene precautions will be stepped up: cars and footwear will be sprayed with disinfectant. In a larger area of five kilometers from the site, limitations on the movement of poultry will be imposed. Dead birds will be incinerated, or in the event of massive numbers, they could also be buried at landfill dumps. If there are many infected birds, and an epidemic is suspected, vaccination of domesticated birds might be considered.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE DECREE

¶18. Farmers have been mandated to keep domestic poultry indoors from March 3 until May 31, with the provision that this may be extended if necessary, as a precautionary measure. On February 28, 2006, MOA brought forward a decree ordering that all poultry in areas at risk should be

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kept inside. Areas at risk include 160 communities, including the Åland Islands, which receive large numbers of water fowl during bird migration each spring. The ministry also expanded the list of risk areas to include a number of poultry breeding areas in Ostrobothnia, Southwest Finland and Savo. The regulations were originally to have taken effect on March 15th, however implementation was begun earlier to allow the precautions to be in place before the spring migration begins. The MOA's guidelines include detailed instructions to veterinary professionals on how to protect themselves from birds carrying the virus.

¶19. The ban on outdoor poultry will not cause much havoc since most birds are kept indoors during the winter months in Finland, with the exception of some ostriches and pheasants. Provincial veterinarians will be allowed to grant permission to deviate from the orders to keep birds indoors only in exceptional situations. This could take place if keeping the birds indoors would significantly hurt their well-being.

AVIAN INFLUENZA HOTLINE

¶10. An AI hotline began operating on February 21. GOF set up the service to alleviate fears over the spread of the H5N1 virus. The staff of the MOA as well that of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (MoSAH) gives updated information on AI on 0800-02277, Monday through Friday 10.00 AM - 06.00 PM. Questions can also be sent by e-mail to the address lintuinfluenssa@mmm.fi. More information about AI can be found on various authorities' web sites on the Internet: MOA: www.mmm.fi/lintuinfluenssa ; EELA: www.eela.fi ; MoSAH: www.stm.fi , National Public Health Institute KTL: www.ktl.fi and National Food Agency, Finland: www.elintarvikevirasto.fi .

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AVIAN INFLUENZA DRILL

¶11. The MOA released the results of a drill held on March 9

to test GOF officials' readiness for handling AI and aimed at testing how well different officials would work together in an outbreak of AI. The Government and several ministry officials tested both decision-making and communications in the case of an emergency. During the drill, officials practiced responding to a situation where the AI disease is found in both wild birds and poultry in Finland. In the scenario, hundreds of dead geese were found at a trailer park in a coastal area of West Finland. On the same evening, a poultry farm in the west of Finland reported a number of bird deaths, shortly after birds had been transported from the farm for slaughter. In the simulated exercise, all birds on the farm were "destroyed," and a three-kilometer quarantine zone was set up around the farm; under the regulations, birds cannot be moved to or from poultry farms within the zone.

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES

¶12. The largest landfill in the Helsinki area, at Ammassuo in Espoo, will be covered by a large mesh fence to keep seagulls away. It is estimated that up to about 10,000 seagulls visit the Ammassuo landfill on a daily basis. A key aim of the planned cage is to protect people working at the landfill against birds that might be infected by AI. Officials at the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Council (YTV) emphasize that fears of AI are not the only reason for the move; seagulls are an annual problem at the dump. They can spread salmonella and cause other types of hygiene problems as well. A cage suspended by poles and cables about 20 meters high is to be set up on top of the landfill. Plans are to put it up in April and May before the seagull migration.

¶13. Retail traders in Finland are being urged to prevent birds from settling on shopping carts which are left outside shops and stores by staff and customers. The Finnish Food Marketing Association has asked stores to be more vigilant in an attempt to reduce the risk of AI and food contamination. Retailers are also being told they should ensure that birds do not enter food stores through windows or storage areas.

THE NATIONAL INFLUENZA PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PLAN

¶14. The National Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Plan was released on March 15, one week later than earlier announced. A shorter version of the plan (in English) can

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be found on MoSAH webpage: "Finnish National Preparedness Plan for an Influenza Epidemic"
[http://www.stm.fi/Resource.phx/vastt/tervh/li ntuf lunssa/kie
liversiot.htx](http://www.stm.fi/Resource.phx/vastt/tervh/li%20tuflunssa/kie%20liversiot.htx)

¶15. A key objective of the plan is to ensure equal services to the population in different areas of the country even in the exceptional conditions of a pandemic, although organization and implementation may differ from region to region. MoSAH has plans to vaccinate all Finns if a pandemic of bird flu breaks out. However, the question of who gets inoculated first depends on the seriousness of the situation.

¶16. According to the preparedness plan, first in line for the vaccine will be health care personnel caring for patients who have caught the disease. If the pandemic proves to be as serious as the Spanish Flu in 1918, inoculations of the whole population would begin, starting with the youngest, and proceeding to older age groups. Babies as young as six months could be given the shots. If the pandemic is of a moderate type, such as the Asian Flu of 1957, or the Hong Kong Flu of 1968, the first to get the vaccine would be those aged 65 and over, as well as those considered at risk because of existing ailments.

¶17. The National Emergency Supply Agency has 1.3 million doses of the Tamiflu influenza medication in stock as well as the same medication, oseltamivir phosphate, in powdered bulk form. The target set by the preparedness plan is that during a pandemic, anyone infected would be treated within 48 hours.

¶18. The Council of State has further decided that in order to test the appropriate operation of the government management systems a pandemic exercise will be organized on April 20, 2006. Additionally, at the end of 2006, when the update of provincial plans has been completed, their appropriateness will be tested through an exercise specifically designed for assessing the operation of Provincial Offices and regional levels of different administrative sectors. Based on lessons learned from this exercise, the National Influenza Pandemic Preparedness plan will be updated as appropriate, and the revised plan will be tested in a national preparedness exercise to be organized during 2007.

FINLAND ORDERS 5.2 MILLION H5N1 VACCINE DOSES

¶19. On Thursday 3/23/2006 the Finnish National Public Health Institute (KTL) signed an agreement to buy 5.2 million vaccine doses for AI, enough to cover the entire population. The order, from the Dutch group Solvay Pharmaceuticals, will cost 20.8 million euros (25 million dollars). The vaccine production is planned to start in the fall, with the clinical testing to establish the vaccine's exact formula and dosage to be carried out in Finland in the coming months.

¶20. In addition, KTL has made an advance reservation deal with Solvay to buy 5.5 million doses of a more targeted AI vaccine. However, that vaccine cannot be developed until an actual pandemic would break out.

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